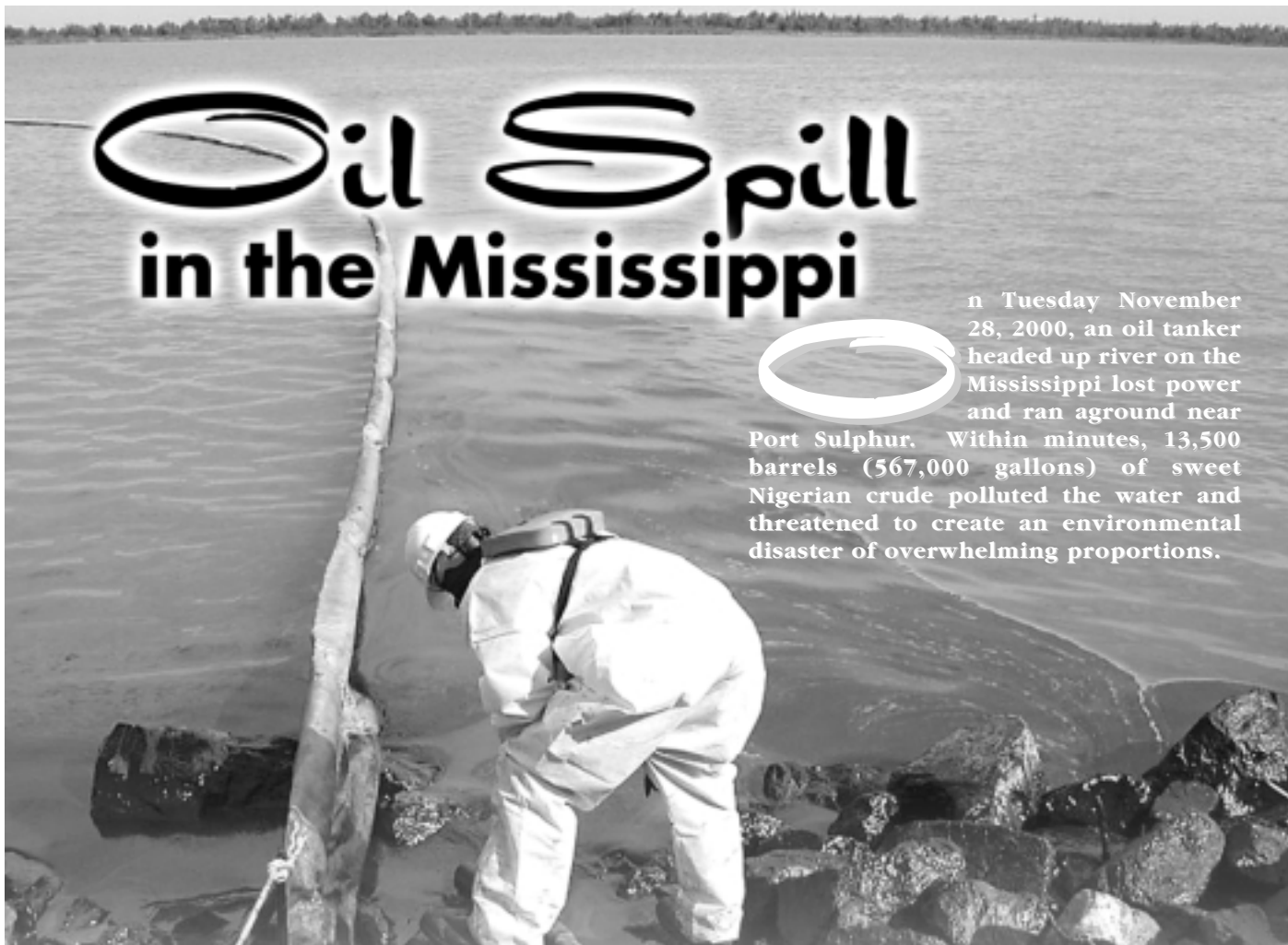


# Oil Spill in the Mississippi



On Tuesday November 28, 2000, an oil tanker headed up river on the Mississippi lost power and ran aground near Port Sulphur. Within minutes, 13,500 barrels (567,000 gallons) of sweet Nigerian crude polluted the water and threatened to create an environmental disaster of overwhelming proportions.

## Oil Spill Recovered in North Louisiana

DEQ responded to an oil spill in early November after a pipeline released 1000 barrels of crude into a rice field in Morehouse Parish. The local Sheriff's office found the accident by responding to a local citizen's call who said he smelled fumes. Soon after the discovery, DEQ was notified and respondents were on their way. Mark Juneau from the DEQ Surveillance section arrived at the site in the early morning hours to size up the situation.

Nothing could be done about the spill late at night, but the company who owned the pipeline immediately shut it down and began to repair it. When daylight broke, DEQ's Lance Beauvais from the Emergency Response section and Casey Head from the Surveillance section arrived at the scene to assess the site and oversee the clean up. Three days later, the contractor hired by the pipeline company flooded the levied rice field to make the oil rise and float on the surface of the water where it could be easily collected. After flooding the field, the contractor used water sprayers to herd the oil into a corner where it was skimmed off the top. The oil was then

Dwight Bradshaw, an Environmental Scientist in the Surveillance section, received a phone call about the spill around 9 p.m. on Tuesday night. Soon after, he began preparing DEQ staff and coordinating with the Coast Guard and other agencies on how to contain and clean up the oil which eventually spread out over 45 miles of the river. Two DEQ employees traveled down to the site of the spill and conducted air-monitoring tests. They did not detect any benzene fumes coming from the oil that would cause a threat to the public. Nothing else could be done until daylight, so they hoped for the best and waited until the next morning.

Dwight, the lead DEQ official at the spill, arrived at the Coast Guard command post for a predawn meeting of all the coordinators. The Coast Guard is the federal body in charge of the spill; the Louisiana Oil Spill Coordinator's Office is the lead state entity. DEQ's main role in the effort was to protect the public and the environment by eliminating all threats to human health.

At sunup, Dwight and other response workers evaluated the damage to determine where the oil could be contained. One of five contractors supplied a helicopter for the agencies to get a better view of the problem. Dwight flew on the first ride and he knew from the looks of things that it was going to be bad.

Once back on the ground, Dwight met again with the response team to determine which areas of the river contained the most oil so the contractor could begin cleaning it up. The clock was running and they had very little time to get the

large oil slicks up before some change in the weather injured the situation. The good news came in the form of wind. The wind blew from the east for two days after the spill, keeping the oil contained on the rocks to the west side of the river. The east bank opens into sensitive marshland with many water passageways where a half-million waterfowl reside. Dwight says, "It would have been a real disaster if the oil had gone the other way." Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (DWF) officials went into the marshland several times to detonate caps to scare away ducks and geese. Only two birds have died and one was recovered and cleaned.

The first few days after the spill, the contractors busied themselves with putting oil booms in the water to contain the crude. An oil boom acts like a life vest and floats on top of the water. Oil collects in the booms where it can be extracted. The river traffic, however, hampered some of the efforts because of the wakes the boats create. The wakes push the water and the oil up on to the shore and sometimes dislodge booms, allowing some crude to flow further downstream. Most of the oil, however, was contained and under control by the Friday following the spill.

DEQ employees scoured the banks of the Mississippi looking for places to collect oil. Once a site was spotted, the contractor would either pull a vacuum truck onto the levy or have a skimmer boat collect the oil.

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